

The Readers' Digest

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DECEMBER 1941

PENGAD-Bayonne, N. J.

93-0008

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Nicotine Knockout, or the Slow Count

By

Gene Tunney

Former heavyweight boxing champion of the world;
Lieutenant Commander, U.S.N.R., now in charge
of navy physical training and athletics.

*A great athlete and conditioner of men
indicts tobacco for poison and fraud.*

IT'S OVER 13 years since I retired from the Heavyweight Championship. But here's a challenge: If Joe Louis will start smoking, and promise to inhale a couple of packages of cigarettes every day for six months, I'll engage to lick him in 15 rounds!

Of course, Joe wouldn't be foolish enough to meet my terms. No boxer, no athlete in training smokes. He knows that whenever nerves, muscles, heart and brain are called upon for a supreme effort, the tobacco-user is the first to fold.

But how about the ordinary chair-sitting citizen who never climbs into a prize ring or laces on a spiked shoe? Does smoking affect *his* vitality, shorten *his* life and nudge him down the trash skid before his time? The grim monosyllabic answer, based on medical testimony, is "yes." Heavy smoking has a positive and demonstrably bad effect on longevity, physical and nervous energy, and general health.

With every puff, heavy smokers shorten their own lives. Dr. Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins found

that among 100,000 heavy (over ten cigarettes a day) smokers, 53,774 die before the age of 60. Among the same number of nonsmokers, only 43,436 die before that age. "Smoking," he announced, "is associated with definite impairment of longevity. This impairment is proportional to the habitual amount of tobacco used." Even if you smoke *moderately*, you have much less chance of reaching 60 than if you don't smoke at all. It's a slow count, but it gets you finally.

The cause of most of the trouble is, of course, nicotine. No one has ever denied that nicotine is poison. Taken clear, it is as quick-acting and fatal as prussic acid. A drop of it on a shaved rabbit causes immediate convulsions and death. The nicotine dissolved out of a few cigarettes and placed on the tongue of a grown man would kill him in 15 minutes. Luckily the bulk of the nicotine in tobacco is volatilized in smoke; you do not get the poison straight. But if you smoke a pack a day, you inhale 400 milligrams of it a week. That much in a single dose would kill you as quick as a bullet.

This powerful poison is the source of all the "pleasure" derived from

smoking. It touches off the mechanism by which the adrenal glands release quick energy from the liver and muscles. You *do* get a "lift" when you light a cigarette. But it's exactly like the lift you get from cocaine, heroin, marijuana. All these things can stimulate the adrenals, cause a momentary increase of sugar in the blood. Under the flogging of the nicotine whip, the body burns up sugar faster; heart action, respiration and blood pressure are kept at a ding-dong pitch. At the end of a two-pack day, the smoker's system has received an unmerciful beating. Impoverished nerves and body cells cry out with fatigue and irritation. The chain-smoker suffers from a chronic "tired feeling." He is an energy bankrupt and must borrow new energy at the outrageous interest rate of still heavier smoking. Meanwhile, his food tastes like a motorman's glove, and a hacking cough keeps his throat as raw as a sandpapered blister. Some fun, smoking!

But these are minor matters. Nicotine leaps straight at the heart and circulatory system. Smoking even *one* cigarette narrows every blood vessel in your body. Dr. Alexis Carrel states that even *one puff* from a cigarette contracts the tiniest capillaries in your legs and feet. As a result of this constriction, the heart must pump faster and harder in order to force blood through the narrowed arteries. The resultant strain is clearly shown in electro-

cardiographic examinations. The Life Extension Institute, which makes thousands of these examinations annually, lists excessive smoking high among causes of anginal heart attacks and Buerger's disease — the latter a horribly painful blocking and tightening of the blood vessels in the body extremities. Nicotine also causes undue amounts of hydrochloric acid to pour into the stomach. Heartburn, indigestion and "acid" conditions are directly traceable to excessive smoking, and an almost certain way of getting stomach ulcers is to smoke regularly on an empty stomach.

But nicotine isn't the only toxic substance found in tobacco. When you inhale, you take carbon monoxide, ammonia, carbolic acid, pyridine and a host of tarry substances into your lungs — and through them into your blood stream. Carbon monoxide causes headaches; ammonia irritates your nose and throat. Pyridine is a powerful irritant of the bronchial tubes. The tarry substances coat your tongue, blacken your teeth and are thought to play an important part in causing mouth and tongue cancer, found oftenest among heavy smokers. Arsenic, sprayed on tobacco plants to kill insects, remains in the processed tobacco in measurable quantity. The scorching heat of the smoke itself, reaching 140 degrees as your cigarette burns down toward the end, sears the mucous membrane of nose, throat and lungs, reducing

your resistance to colds and other respiratory diseases. "Not a cough in a carload" may be true about cigarettes themselves — the cough is in the smoker's roughened throat and congested chest.

Too many people accept their craving for tobacco as a commonplace social habit. But I maintain that heavy smoking is a *disease symptom*. Whenever I see a chain-smoker in action I know at once that he is plain *sick* and should submit to a searching medical examination to discover the underlying cause of his smoking. On the physical side, this may range from a thyroid deficiency to a faulty diet or lack of exercise. Or there may be an emotional factor. My psychiatrist friends tell me that most of their patients are frantic smokers. When their lives get straightened out, the craving for tobacco falls away.

I've always opposed the pernicious advertising that extolls the "benefits" of tobacco-using. While I was training for my second fight with Jack Dempsey I was offered \$15,000 to endorse a certain brand of cigarettes. I didn't want to be rude, so, in declining, I merely said I didn't smoke. Next day the advertising man came back with another offer: \$12,000 if I would let my picture be used with the statement that "Stinkies must be good, because all my friends smoke them." That compelled me to say what I thought — that cigarettes were a

foul pestilence, and that advertising which promoted their use was a national menace.

I am here reminded of the Metropolitan Opera tenor whose picture was blazoned on billboards with this joyful declamation: "Gaspies Do Not Hurt My Throat." When asked about it, he laughed and replied: "It is true, Gaspies never hurt my throat — I don't smoke."

Such misleading advertising I cannot rap too hard. It is dangerous, particularly to our 35,000,000 young people. To contract the tobacco habit when the growth factors of the body are exerting themselves to their maximum is to handicap oneself physically and mentally for life.

To me the ugliest of advertising is that which features soldiers or sailors smoking cigarettes. As Director of the Navy's Physical Fitness Program, I can bluntly say that few things could be worse for physical fitness than promoting the cigarette habit.

Sentimentalists will object: "Why deprive the boys of the innocent pleasure of tobacco?" My reply is: "Should our citizen army be less rigidly conditioned than a college football team?" And here's a special word to mothers — send your boy in camp athletic equipment instead of cigarettes — a baseball mitt or a set of boxing gloves.

If you think this sounds goody-goody, take a look at my compan-

ions in the nonsmoking section. The late Knute Rockne, Notre Dame's wonder coach, said: "Tobacco slows up reflexes, lowers morale; any advertising that says smoking helps an athlete is a falsehood and a fraud." William Muldoon, famous conditioner of men, considered nicotine the greatest harm to health in the modern world. Ty Cobb, the famous Georgia Peach of baseball, says: "Cigarette smoking stupefies the brain, saps vitality, undermines health and weakens moral fiber. No one who hopes to be successful in any line can afford to contract so detrimental a habit." In the face of such testimony I can only ask, with Tolstoi:

"Why do men stupefy themselves with tobacco?"

I have never heard a sensible reply. But let me tell you the story of the Bedouin chief who told the young men of his tribe: "There are three good reasons for smoking: First, if you smoke enough tobacco, you smell so strong the dogs will never bite you. Second, if you smoke long enough, you will develop a lung trouble which will make you cough even when you sleep. Robbers hearing you cough will think you are awake and so will not try to steal your belongings. Third, if you smoke as much as you can, you will have many diseases, and will die young."



Character Analysis at a Glance

☞ WHEN the whites of the eyes are naturally tinged with red, you may count on a suspicious nature and a quick, bad temper. Drooping eyelids denote musicians and poets. A man with both small eyes and small ears is not to be trusted. The man with shifty light-blue eyes is a lover of feminine beauty and the women he invites out require chaperons.

— Louise Bascom Barratt in *The American Magazine*

☞ A WOMAN with a triangle-shaped fingernail can't keep secrets and is not to be trusted. A man with long, slim fingernails is artistic, but he'll never be a good provider. Little round nails show honesty coupled with a hot temper. A person with strong moons will rise high in his world. Ridges on the nails show nervous temperament. — AP, and Margaret Barton in *Des Moines Register*

☞ PEOPLE with vertical furrows on their foreheads are intellectual fighters and enjoy arguing. Horizontal furrows indicate the worrier.

— Nancy Van Court in *The American Magazine*

☞ THERE IS a very simple test by which we can tell good people from bad. If a smile improves a man's face, he is a good man; if a smile disfigures his face, he is a bad man. — William Lyon Phelps